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GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH

*National and Regional Internet
Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)*



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)

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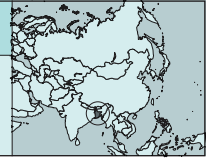
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A special edition of GISWatch, "Internet governance from the edges: NRIs in their own words", is being published as a companion edition to the 2017 GISWatch annual report. It looks at the history, challenges and achievements of NRIs, as recounted by their organisers. It is available at <https://www.giswatch.org>



Bytesforall Bangladesh

Munir Hasan, Partha Sarker and Warefta Lamia Rahman
www.bytesforall.org

Introduction

The Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum (BIGF)¹ was formed in 2006. Its executive committee, which is open to all stakeholders, is currently chaired by the minister of information. Representing the BIGF, the committee has engaged in numerous internet governance meetings over the years, and convened several multistakeholder national IGF consultations itself. Unlike other national forums, the BIGF has had at least two important impacts on policy in Bangladesh: raising awareness about the top-level Bangla domain, and contributing to the draft Digital Security Act. This report details the engagement of the BIGF committee in internet governance platforms since its inception, and identifies its challenges and successes.

What is expected from a national IGF?

The first phase of the World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva in 2003 set up a Working Group on Internet Governance (WGIG) to prepare a report by the second phase of WSIS in Tunis in November 2005.² This report first mooted the idea of a multistakeholder internet governance forum, a need which was formally established in the Tunis Agenda. Paragraph 72 of WSIS Tunis Agenda mandated the United Nations (UN) “a convening power and the authority to serve as a neutral space for all actors on an equal footing. [...] The Internet Governance Forum (IGF) can thereby be useful in shaping the international agenda and in preparing the ground for negotiations and decision-making in other institutions. The IGF has no power of redistribution, and yet it has the power of recognition – the power to identify key issues.”³

The establishment of the IGF was formally announced by the UN Secretary-General in July 2006. It was first convened in October-November 2006 and has held an annual meeting since then. The mandate has been renewed twice, in 2011 and in 2015.

As per its mandate, the IGF has both a policy-related and capacity-building role, although some researchers think the policy-related role of the IGF is more primary than its capacity-building role.⁴ The IGF’s mode of engagement is multistakeholderism. Paragraph 72 of Tunis Agenda says one of the aims is to “[s]trengthen and enhance the engagement of stakeholders in existing and/or future Internet governance mechanisms, particularly those from developing countries.”⁵

DiploFoundation also identified five baskets of issues in internet governance discussion,⁶ which form the substance of the BIGF approach:

- *Infrastructure and standards:* This includes internet infrastructure, end-to-end networks, domains, HTTP, and packet switching.
- *Jurisdiction:* Includes cybercrime, data protection, privacy, security and copyright.
- *Development:* Includes the digital divide and transfer of know-how and of technology.
- *Economic:* Issues such as taxation, customs and revenue models.
- *Socio-cultural:* Includes content control, privacy, multilingualism and education.⁷

1 www.bangladeshigf.org

2 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_Governance_Forum

3 Internet Governance Forum. (2011). Background note: What is the Internet Governance Forum? https://www.intgovforum.org/cms/2011/press/Backgrounder_What_is_IGF_final.pdf

4 Singh, P. J. (2011). *First Set of Contributions to the Working Group on IGF Improvements (WGIGF)*. IT for Change. https://www.itforchange.net/sites/default/files/ITFC/IT_for_Change1.pdf

5 Tunis Agenda for the Information Society. <https://www.itu.int/net/wsis/docs2/tunis/off/6rev1.html>

6 Kurbalija, J. (2004). *The Classification of Internet Governance*. DiploFoundation. https://www.diplomacy.edu/sites/default/files/Internet_Governance_Classification_ver_07102004.pdf

7 In an interview with Bytesforall Bangladesh, A. H. M. Bazlur Rahman from the Bangladesh NGO’s Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC), who is one of the core organisers of the BIGF, said that human rights should also be another basket included in internet governance deliberations.

BIGF objectives and operations

The BIGF was formed in 2006 with the objectives of:

- Supporting the establishment of a national multistakeholder forum specialising in internet governance issues.
- Promoting the development of internet governance as a recognised interdisciplinary field of study, dialogue and research.
- Linking theoretical and applied research and policy on internet governance, broadly defined.
- Facilitating informed dialogue on policy issues and related matters between internet governance stakeholders (i.e. government, private sector, civil society, media and academia).

The forum is run by an Executive Council⁸ that represents different stakeholders, including the government, private sector, civil society organisations and academia.⁹ The Council sits once every two months to discuss activities, sometimes meeting more frequently than that in case of need.

Bangladesh civil society has a long history of participating in different IGF processes. One review¹⁰ suggests that the majority of participating organisations from Asia at the first global IGF held in Athens in 2006 were from Bangladesh and Japan. The second IGF in Rio de Janeiro (12-15 November 2007) also had good representation from Bangladesh, including the Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC),¹¹ the Bangladesh Friendship Education Society (BFES)¹² and Voices for Interactive Choice and Empowerment (VOICE).¹³ Since then, BIGF members have regularly participated in different IGF events, including the fourth IGF in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt in 2009; the first Asia Pacific Regional IGF (APrIGF) in Hong Kong, China in 2010; the fifth IGF in Vilnius,

Lithuania in 2010; the sixth IGF in Nairobi, Kenya in 2011; the third APrIGF in Tokyo, Japan in 2012; the Global Multistakeholder Meeting on the Future of Internet Governance (NETmundial)¹⁴ in Sao Paulo, Brazil in 2014; the ninth IGF in Istanbul, Turkey in 2014; the sixth APrIGF in Macau in 2015; the 10th IGF in João Pessoa, Brazil in 2015; the 11th IGF in Guadalajara, Mexico in 2016; and the eighth APrIGF in Bangkok, Thailand in 2017.

BIGF activities: 2009-2017

A seven-member delegation from the BIGF attended the fourth IGF in Egypt in 2009. That participation was very important because the BIGF played a role in getting the Bangladesh government to submit an application for the top-level Bangla domain (.bd) to the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN)¹⁵ in February 2010, which was accepted on 4 October 2016.

In an interview with Bytesforall Bangladesh, M. A. Haque Anu, the secretary general of the BIGF, explained how the process started. At the 2009 IGF, the BIGF delegation along with the minister of information sat down with the then-CEO of ICANN to discuss the idea of having a top-level Bangla domain. The minister then raised it in the Parliamentary Committee of Post and Telecommunication, and upon approval, proposed it to the prime minister of Bangladesh. The Bangladesh government applied for the .bd domain on International Mother Language Day (21 February 2010). ICANN then worked out all the technical issues with the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).¹⁶

The BIGF also worked to raise awareness about top-level domains and Bangla websites through organising and participating in meetings and consultations. The first consultation¹⁷ was held in October 2009 prior to the IGF in Egypt and was attended by a number of professional bodies such as internet service provider (ISP) and software associations, regulatory bodies, representatives from academia, and telecoms companies. Three papers were presented on top-level domains discussing global, regional and national issues and goals pertaining to the IGF, and emphasising an action plan to reach those goals.

8 In this report, when we talk about the BIGF engaging in internet governance forums, we specifically mean the Executive Council or its members.

9 The 2017-2018 Executive Council includes the following members: Hasanul Haq Inu, MP, Hon. Minister, Ministry of Information, chairperson; Akram H Chowdhury, chairman, Barind Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA), executive vice chairperson; Sohel Awrongjob, ICT expert, treasurer; A. H. M. Bazlur Rahman, CEO, Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communication (BNNRC), member; Mohammad Shahinur Rahman, CEO, Red Line, member; and Mohammad Abdul Haque Anu, secretary general, Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum.

10 Chattapadhyay, S. (2015, 19 August). Civil Society Organisations and Internet Governance in Asia - Open Review. *Centre for Internet and Society*. <https://cis-india.org/raw/civil-society-organisations-and-internet-governance-in-asia-open-review>

11 bnnrc.net

12 bfes.net

13 <https://www.voicebd.org>

14 netmundial.br

15 <https://www.icann.org>

16 www.btrc.gov.bd

17 Bangladesh Internet Governance Forum. (2009, 22 October). Meeting of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) held at Dhaka. www.bangladeshigf.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=51:meeting-of-the-internet-governance-forum-igf-held-at-dhaka&catid=1:bigfreport&Itemid=18

In 2010 a delegation participated in an Asia-Pacific regional consultation in Hong Kong and at the IGF in Vilnius, Lithuania, the same year. The BIGF organised another consultation in Dhaka in August 2011, a few weeks prior to the IGF in Kenya. The meeting attracted good participation from the government as the minister of information was present along with the chairman of the BTRC.

The consultation touched on a wide range of topics besides top-level domains, including internet access, privacy, security and openness. The minister talked about official participation in the IGF and ICANN and the availability of local content. Another participant, Mahfuz Ashraf from the Department of Management Information Systems at the University of Dhaka, touched on the capacity-building dimension of the IGF process and emphasised that the BIGF undertakes programmes for technical skill development. The issue of IPv6 also received prominence in the conversation.

In May 2012, the BIGF organised its third consultation in the conference room of the BTRC in Dhaka, just before the WSIS Forum on 14-18 May in Geneva. The BNNRC and the IT portal Comjagat.com¹⁸ were co-organisers. The consultation highlighted a number of issues including internet governance and achievements at the IGF, the WSIS Plan of Action,¹⁹ the country's broadband commission for digital development, Bangla domain management, and value-added services. Reza Selim, project manager of Amader Gram,²⁰ presented a paper on the broadband commission and digital development, while Cornel Rakibul Hasan, the director of the BTRC, discussed the management of the Bangla domain.

The BIGF, in collaboration with the Asia Pacific Networking Group (APNG) Bangladesh,²¹ organised the Bangladesh Youth Internet Governance Forum (BDYIGF) on 7 October 2013. The event was hosted by BRAC University in Dhaka.²² The youth constitute the largest internet user group in Bangladesh, and relevant issues such as e-services, mobile banking, e-health, the digital divide, internet security, social networking, and the history of the internet in Bangladesh were discussed in the day-long event. There was also an awareness session on internet governance and BIGF activities. Around 40 registered participants, presenters, special guests and

journalists attended the event. The national youth forum followed a similar regional forum run by APriGF in 2010.

2014 was a particularly busy time for the BIGF. Its delegation attended the NETmundial meeting in Sao Paulo, Brazil on 23-24 April, and the ninth IGF in Istanbul, Turkey on 2-5 September. In the opening sessions at NETmundial, the minister of information commented on the principles of the IGF and its roadmap for the future.

In 2014, a multistakeholder steering group²³ was created to support and ensure the proper conduct of the organisational work of the annual APriGF. The purpose of the regional IGF is to promote and encourage dialogue among all stakeholders involved with internet governance related issues in the Asia Pacific region, and to act as an interface between the Asia Pacific IGF community and the global IGF community. Several members of the BIGF, including M. A. Haque Anu, the secretary-general, and M. Abdul Awal, the treasurer, were among the core members of this group. It had its first meeting during the IGF in 2014 and organised a few other meetings to highlight issues from an Asia Pacific perspective.

In 2015, the BIGF participated in the sixth APriGF in Macau. Bytesforall Bangladesh also had representation in the meeting. As per its report,²⁴ The minister of information, who is also the chairman of the BIGF, attended the APriGF opening ceremony, where he talked about localising the IGF processes.

In 2016, the BIGF organised a successful roundtable at the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) in Dhaka.²⁵ At the opening session, the minister showed a video clip on internet governance, followed by a PowerPoint presentation with a brief overview of the IGF and APriGF. Participants were also informed about the upcoming IGF in Mexico that was to take place on 6-9 December. The roundtable was attended by a large number of stakeholders, including ISP and software associations, professionals, civil society organisations, telecom operators, and the BTRC. It seems that the participants from the technology sector were mostly interested in technology-related issues such as IPv6, big data and cloud computing, while the civil society participants talked about internet rights and safety and privacy issues. The minister touched on the issue of cybercrime, emphasising

18 www.comjagat.com

19 <https://www.itu.int/net/osis/docs/geneva/official/poa.html>

20 A village-based ICT-for-development initiative of the Bangladesh Friendship Education Society (BFES). amadergram.org

21 www.apngcamp.asia/?page_id=30

22 www.bracu.ac.bd

23 rigf.asia/msg.html

24 Bytesforall Bangladesh. (2015, 1 August). Bytesforall Bangladesh's participation at Gender and Internet Governance Exchange (gigX) and Asia Pacific Regional Internet Governance Forum (APriGF) in Macau, China. www.bytesforall.org/?p=257

25 Haque Anu, M. A. (2016, 10 December). Focusing Internet Governance. *The Daily Observer*. www.observerbd.com/details.php?id=47601

the need to develop capacity and legal remedies to address the issue. Many argued that the principle of net neutrality be upheld and access to internet be considered as one of the basic rights of citizens.

In 2017, the BIGF joined the eighth APRIGF in Bangkok, Thailand. However, the most significant policy intervention event that year was its national consultation on the draft of the Digital Security Act 2016,²⁶ which it organised in collaboration with Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET)²⁷ in September. It was a timely event, as the government was seeking feedback on the draft of the Act. When the ICT Act was introduced back in 2006 and amended in 2013, its section 57 was criticised by various groups for censoring views and curbing freedom of expression. Therefore, the new Digital Security Act brought in a fresh perspective, according to the minister. The minister also said that the Act would be formulated in line with human rights, such as the rights to privacy and freedom of expression. The minister further reiterated that the purpose of the Act was to curb cybercrime, not to control cyber traffic. The event was attended by a number of civil society members, as well as students and private sector bodies.

Tahmina Rahman from ARTICLE 19,²⁸ an international human rights organisation, made a detailed presentation on the 46 sections and seven chapters of the Act. She suggested some amendments, such as changes to clauses that were too broadly defined and therefore vulnerable to an abuse of power, and to include the requirement of precise intent and harm for existing offences. She also recommended the inclusion of the perspective of public interest.²⁹ Other participants talked about the need for multiple cyber tribunals and to have judges with technical expertise in order to deal with cybercrime.

The BIGF is also set to organise the Bangladesh School of Internet Governance (BDSIG) as a local chapter of the Asia Pacific School of Internet Governance (APSIG), to be held later this year.³⁰ The purpose is to organise a two-day training workshop involving students, journalists and academia, amongst others, and dealing with relevant issues such as the history of internet governance, data

governance, digital security, the digital economy, the internet of things, and infrastructure and standards. A certificate will be offered for completion of the course. As many as 60 participants have already confirmed their participation.

It seems that the BIGF is going through a transition in order to extend its role from event organisation to policy intervention. The BIGF's campaign for the top-level Bangla domain and its contribution to the draft Digital Security Act are good examples of this. The need for capacity building came up in several consultation meetings that the BIGF organised, and while the minister has also expressed interest in this, financial and human resources remain a constant constraint.

So far, all national consultations organised by the BIGF have happened in Dhaka, but the demand for wider outreach is growing. The need for outreach is recognised by the BIGF. For example, in a consultation meeting in 2016, Bazlur Rahman, the CEO of the BNNRC who is also a member of the BIGF Executive Council, said that "the BIGF should adopt an inclusive approach. It must go outside Dhaka." The forum has already started to live cast its consultation meetings to encourage remote participation. It seems that many of its consultation meetings are held right before global and regional events, allowing perspectives on the upcoming events to be shared. The most recent consultation – on the draft Digital Security Act – is obviously a break from that tradition.

The BIGF is a volunteer-driven forum. The platform is open for participation by any stakeholder, including civil society organisations. It is as easy as sending an email requesting participation.

The BIGF organisational structure has its challenges. It is not clear how the power balance is addressed, for example. Is there any opportunity for other stakeholders to be the chairperson on rotation? If the minister is changed, will the government be equally committed to its activities? The secretary general of the BIGF mentioned that the minister is involved much more in his personal capacity as one of the founders of this initiative. But the BIGF event has always been attended by other units and officials from the government.

The BIGF secretary general also thinks there is a problem with resource limitations. In the past, the BIGF organising committee attended a number of global and regional IGF events after raising funds to attend them. Sometimes, members of the committee participate in these events using their own resources. Nevertheless, a shortage of funds for participation remains a challenge and a bottleneck to future strategic activities.

²⁶ <https://www.forum-asia.org/uploads/wp/2016/08/Digital-Security-Act-English-09.03.2016.pdf> (Bengali version of the Act: <https://www.ictd.gov.bd/page/17/draft-of-acts-and-rules>)

²⁷ www.buet.ac.bd

²⁸ <https://www.article19.org>

²⁹ ARTICLE 19. (2016). *Legal Analysis – Bangladesh: Draft Digital Security Act*. <https://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/38368/en/bangladesh-draft-digital-security-act>

³⁰ <https://sites.google.com/site/apsigasia>

Action steps

The BIGF needs to focus more on single issue-based discussions and contributions. Consultations on the draft Digital Security Act were a good start, but this needs to be taken further to understand what research and evidence say in order to understand the changes that can be made. The consultations in the past have covered too many different topics. Rather, civil society advocacy and campaigning need to be focused and supported by evidence and research.

There seems to be little or no awareness of internet governance issues in Bangladesh. The BIGF should also focus on awareness generation

activities including writing for the media, preparing more audiovisual resources, linking to various universities, running training programmes, and social media-based campaigns. With the BDSIG, that process has started, but it needs to be taken further into institutional engagement.

There should be a broader call for participation in BIGF processes. If the Executive Council could be made more representative of ideas and initiatives, then the whole process would be strengthened. BIGF events also need to go out of the capital city Dhaka to engage different stakeholders across the country.

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs) are now widely recognised as a vital element of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) process. In fact, they are seen to be the key to the sustainability and ongoing evolution of collaborative, inclusive and multistakeholder approaches to internet policy development and implementation.

A total of 54 reports on NRIs are gathered in this year's Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch). These include 40 country reports from contexts as diverse as the United States, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea and Colombia.

The country reports are rich in approach and style and highlight several challenges faced by activists organising and participating in national IGFs, including broadening stakeholder participation, capacity building, the unsettled role of governments, and impact.

Seven regional reports analyse the impact of regional IGFs, their evolution and challenges, and the risks they still need to take to shift governance to the next level, while seven thematic reports offer critical perspectives on NRIs as well as mapping initiatives globally.

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2017 Report

<https://www.GISWatch.org>

